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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 008054

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/17/2015

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SUBJECT: RAJASTHAN PROVIDES NO LET-UP IN UNRELENTING BAD NEWS FOR THE BJP

Classified By: Political Counselor Geoff Pyatt, for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

1. (C) Summary: Rajasthan has joined a long list of places where BJP fortunes are on the wane. Vasundhara Raje pulled off a stunning upset victory to become Chief Minister in 2003 and many thought her administration would be one of the rare "success stories" for the embattled BJP. However, her party is deeply divided, her opponents are plotting against her, and she has proven to be an ineffective administrator facing allegations of misrule and corruption. This has prompted growing speculation that the BJP may remove her and install a new Chief Minister closer to the RSS. With the BJP's fortunes on the decline in Rajasthan, even such a radical move may not stave off defeat in the next election scheduled for 2007. End Summary.

All-pervading Factionalism

2. (U) Reflecting the national trend, there is a growing divide in the Rajasthan BJP between RSS and non-RSS factions. A public letter written by Chandraj Singhvi, a leading politician and an architect of Raje's upset victory in 2003, recently complained that non-RSS party members were being given "step-motherly treatment" in Rajasthan, and accused the BJP of placing only Sangh-Parivar members in important positions. Singhvi predicted that this course would lead to "decades" of defeat for the BJP.

3. (U) On October 6, Education Minister Ghanshyam Tiwari and Industries Minister Narpat Singh Rajvi openly revolted against Raje, accusing her of heavy-handedness and implying that her administration encouraged corruption. They complained of a "lack of transparency" in the approval of major industrial development projects such as the World Trade Park and several Special Economic Zones (SEZ's). Rajasthan recently awarded 1,000 acres of land to Mahindra and Mahindra for a "technology corridor," and Tiwari asserted that Raje took the land from farmers in his constituency without adequate payment, and without first consulting the cabinet.

Tales of Woe

4. (C) During Poloff's October 6-7 visit to Jaipur, journalists and politicians confirmed that all was not well with the BJP in the state. Rohit Parihar of "India Today" described how Rajasthani Media has linked close Raje associates, including a state Cabinet Minister, to well-known prostitutes/dancing girls. Parihar confirmed that the growing split between RSS and non-RSS factions was encouraged by Raje's long-term rival Murli Manohar Joshi. Raje was also stung by the negative media coverage following the revelation of the total disappearance of tigers from the Rathambore game reserve, and her centralization of excise duty collection has led to falling revenues and growing corruption allegations.

5. (C) Education Minister Tiwari complained to Poloff that tens of millions of rupees were disappearing, the "technology corridor" was a land giveaway, and that Raje has padded her cabinet with the "worst" politicians in the state. Tiwari predicted that Joshi will become BJP President in December and remove Raje. He explained that with the Congress opposition weak and divided, the BJP has descended into factionalism and corruption and that Joshi will have to "clean house."

Coup Plotting

6. (C) BJP leader and MLA Vishwa Modi confided that he is secretly plotting with fellow MLA's from the BJP and Congress

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to form a new regional party to capture power. Modi claimed that most MLA's are unhappy with Congress and BJP "meddling," although the BJP is the "worst party in the state," because of its dominance by "RSS idiots" with no administrative ability. The new party would renounce Hindutva and actively recruit Muslims, Hindus, and Dalits to construct a stable coalition capable of winning and holding power. He predicted that if nothing is done, the BJP would disintegrate and Congress return in the next election.

Bio Notes

17. (C) Tiwari openly told Poloff that he intends to replace Raje as Chief Minister. He is a devout Brahmin, in a state where his caste is not influential, and sees himself as a natural mediator between contentious castes. Tiwari is close to the RSS and actively promotes Hindutva and is counting on Joshi's patronage to put him in power. He predicted that Raje would be given a BJP management position in New Delhi, possibly as General Secretary.

18. (C) MLA Modi, who inherited a large marble business, is very wealthy and ambitious. He defected from Congress to help Raje devise a winning strategy in 2003, and expected her to name him to the Cabinet. Disappointed, he is now plotting against her and Tiwari. He is still very close to Congress and believes his followers in the BJP and Congress will make him Chief Minister.

19. (C) Raje is extremely religious and spends days at a time worshipping at a favorite temple in rural Rajasthan, where she is devoted to the deity (murti) there. Despite this, she resents the RSS and relates well with Muslims and Christians. Raje's astrologer told her that the secretariat is not "auspicious," and she has constructed an office at her residence, increasing her alienation from the state civil service, which rarely interacts with her. Considered an outsider in Rajasthan, she has done little to endear herself to the state's entrenched elites. Most assume she is not really comfortable in Jaipur and would not be averse to returning to Delhi if offered a suitable position.

Comment: Can Radical Surgery Save the Patient?

10. (C) When elected in 2003, Vasundhara Raje appeared to be one of the future BJP superstars. Since then, the party's long decline has also encompassed her administration. The Rajasthan BJP failed to unite behind its Chief Minister and has been engulfed by factionalism. Her days as Chief Minister may be numbered, as several rivals with strong local roots are plotting against her. Rajasthan is another disappointment for the BJP at a time when things are going wrong all over the country for the party. With the BJP's standing on the wane, even a change of administrations may not stave off electoral defeat.
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